



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Hoeven Proclaims *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota State Health Department Encourages Women To “Get Fit for Pregnancy”

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. John Hoeven has proclaimed January 2009 as *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota.

To highlight ways to prevent birth defects, the North Dakota Department of Health is joining the National Birth Defects Prevention Network and the March of Dimes to share the message that a mother’s health – including her weight, before, during and after pregnancy – is an important foundation for having a healthy baby who grows into a healthy child. “Getting Fit for Pregnancy” is the theme of this year’s National Birth Defects Prevention Month.

Good health habits include knowing your family history, getting regular check-ups with a doctor and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including being physically active and eating a healthy diet. For every woman from puberty to menopause, these habits also should include taking a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid daily, starting before she gets pregnant, to improve the likelihood of delivering a healthy baby.

“Many women know that being overweight increases their chance for diabetes and other health conditions in themselves, but they may not realize that being obese or even just overweight creates unnecessary risks to the health of their babies,” said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D. “Improving the health of mothers and their babies is why we’re reminding women, their families and health-care providers about importance of ‘Getting Fit for Pregnancy.’”

In North Dakota, about 44 percent of women of childbearing age are overweight or obese. Mothers-to-be who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop high blood pressure, gestational diabetes and preeclampsia – conditions that add to the chance of having a premature baby. In addition, studies show that babies of obese mothers are more likely to be born with birth defects like spina bifida.

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“Women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant can do simple things to improve their chances of a healthy pregnancy,” Dwelle said. “The first thing a pregnant woman should do is visit her health-care provider and discuss healthy lifestyle changes that can help prevent birth defects.”

For more information about *Birth Defects Prevention Month*, contact Devaiah Muccatira, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4963 or dmuccatira@nd.gov.

PROCLAMATION
BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH
JANUARY 2009

WHEREAS, birth defects can occur in any family, regardless of the parents’ race, health history, economic status or education; and

WHEREAS, birth defects affect one in every 33 babies in the United States and are a leading cause of death; in North Dakota, about one in every five infant deaths are the result of birth defects; and

WHEREAS, early identification of a child with a birth defect and early intervention services typically improve the child’s quality of life, and may even save his or her life; and

WHEREAS, babies born to mothers who are overweight or obese are more at risk for birth defects, resulting from the mothers’ increased risk of developing high blood pressure, preeclampsia and gestational diabetes during pregnancy, and having labor and delivery complications; and

WHEREAS, women are encouraged to take a multivitamin with folic acid during pregnancy to prevent serious defects of the brain and spinal cord, and to help their babies reach a healthy weight.

NOW, THEREFORE, as the Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim January 2009, BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH in the state of North Dakota.

John Hoeven
Governor

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